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Kyrgyzstan: Alternative service; administration of the program; applicants; conditions; copy of the law in English (2003-January 2005).
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Although information on alternative service in Kyrgyzstan is scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate, several sources indicate that alternative service does exist (*Vecherniy Bishkek* 27 Aug. 2004; *ibid.* 18 Oct. 2004; *Argumenty i Fakty* 10 Nov. 2004; *Kabar* 15 June 2002; *ibid.* 19 March 2003; *Interfax* 30 Aug. 2004; *Kyrgyzstan* 13 June 2002).

An alternative service law was originally adopted in 1992 (Kyrgyzstan 16 Dec. 1992) and replaced by a new version in 2002 (*ibid.* 13 June 2002). The Website of the Kyrgyzstan Ministry of Defence provides the table of contents of the new law (*ibid.*), but not the text.

However, according to a 15 June 2002 news report from the official Kyrgyzstan national news agency *Kabar*, candidates for alternative service must apply in writing to the regional or municipal call-up commission. Any citizen between the ages of 18 and 27 is eligible for alternative service if he is a member of a religious organization that does not allow military service, if he comes from a poor family that includes, apart from the conscript, four or more children under the age of 18, if he has a disabled brother, sister or parent, if he has received a conditional sentence, or if he satisfies various other criteria (*Kabar* 15 June 2002).

A 10 November 2004 article in the Bishkek edition of *Argumenty i Fakty* states about 20 percent of those who perform alternative service do so on the basis of references provided by religious organizations. In April 2004, the defense minister of Kyrgyzstan stated that the proportion of conscripts found unfit for military service had increased from 46.9 percent in 1999 to 58.8 percent in 2003 (RFE/RL 7 Apr. 2004). However, according to an article published on 18 October 2004 in *Vecherniy Bishkek*, only about 20 percent of conscripts are declared unfit for military service, and some are selected for an alternative service. The article added that there would be close to 7,000 conscripts in the alternative service in the autumn of 2004 (*Vecherniy Bishkek* 18 Oct. 2004). This number is also reported in the Bishkek-based *Argumenty i Fakty* (10 Nov. 2004). According to a 30 August 2004 *Interfax* News Agency report, conscripts are called up for military and alternative service twice a year, and three thousand to four thousand men are conscripted in each call-up period.

Alternative service is for a period of 24 months, or 18 months if the

conscript has higher education (Interfax 18 Oct. 2004; Kabar 15 June 2002), and should normally be carried out in establishments located close to the conscript's permanent residence (ibid.). These establishments may be "ministries and administrative departments, enterprises, foundations and organisations located in the republic" (*Vecherniy Bishkek* 27 Aug. 2004; Interfax 18 Oct. 2004). Conscripts may receive short-term vocational training organized by educational or commercial establishments (Kabar 15 June 2002). An article in *The Broken Rifle*, published by War Resisters' International, states that according to the new law, 20 per cent of the salary earned by someone performing alternative service has to be handed over to the Ministry of Defence (*The Broken Rifle* Nov. 2002). This was already the case according to the 1992 law (Kyrgyzstan 16 Dec. 1992, art. 12), but no additional information corroborating the presence of this requirement in the new law has been found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. Those performing alternative service may also be required to contribute to law enforcement efforts and assist in natural disasters, epidemics and other emergencies (Kabar 19 March 2003).

According to the Ministry of Defense, local military registration and enlistment offices are responsible for ensuring the success of the recruitment process by scheduling meetings with the conscripts and their parents and installing help lines (*Vecherniy Bishkek* 18 Oct. 2004). The Kyrgyz newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek* adds that "[d]raft boards, that include representatives of local authorities, MoI [Media Commissioner in Kyrgyzstan], healthcare institutions, and social organizations, decide who should enlist" (18 Oct. 2004).

No additional information on the conditions of alternative service and no copy of the 2002 law on alternative service were found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

However, the following information on changes to the military service might be useful. Two sources indicate that in accordance with a legislative amendment signed by the president in July 2004, the length of military service will be reduced from 18 months to 12 months (AP 22 July 2004; RFE/RL 23 July 2004). The amendment will take effect on 1 January 2006 (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources : One oral source consulted did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response. Two attempts to contact non-governmental organizations were unsuccessful.

Internet sources, including: Amnesty International, Center for Defense

Information, Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic to the United States of America and Canada, Embassy of the United States in Kyrgyzstan, Eurasianet.org, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, Internews.kg, The Kyrgyz Committee for Human Rights (KCHR), Kyrgyzinfo, Soros Foundation-Kyrgyzstan, War Resisters' International.

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